

- 2008 Farm Bill Now Headed to Senate and Then White House for Signature -

Washington, D.C. – Today, U.S. Rep. John Hall helped Congress pass the 2008 Farm Bill, which includes key Hudson Valley priorities. The 21st Century Farm bill provides an increased commitment and funding to sustainable agriculture and specialty crops that are the mainstay of Hudson Valley farming, promotes the production of homegrown renewable energy, makes critical reforms to farm programs, and helps to protect the environment. The Agreement passed the House by a vote of 318 to 106, a veto-proof margin.

“The Farm Bill passed today is making critical reforms to U.S. agriculture policy,” said Hall. “We’re changing our focus and priorities to sustainable development, specialty crops like those grown in the Hudson Valley, nutritional programs, payments to the family farmers who actually need it and cellulosic biofuels that will bring real energy independence in America instead of subsidizing corporate agriculture and corn-based ethanol.”

A New Emphasis on Conservation to Protect the Environment

The Farm Bill boosts Conservation programs by \$7.9 billion. Conservation programs reduce soil erosion, enhance water supplies, improve water and air quality, increase wildlife habitat and reduce damage caused by floods. Funding for the Farm and Ranch Land Protection Program to protect agricultural lands from urban and suburban development pressure is doubled, and funding for other environmental programs is increased.

Congressman Hall is an ardent supporter of sustainable farming and conservation programs. Hall inserted an amendment to the Farm Bill that passed the House to reward Muck Soil farmers who engage in responsible conservation practices. The Hall Conservation on Muck Soils Program Amendment would have created a specific Conservation on Muck Soils Program to support Hudson Valley onion growers. While Hall’s amendment passed the House in July, it was not included in the legislative text of the final Conference Report passed today. However, Hall made sure that the unique problems faced by the Hudson Valley muck soil farmers are noted in the report and Hall secured a commitment from the Chairman of the House Agriculture Committee Chairman to keep working on the issue. This commitment was formalized for the record in a colloquy on the House floor today between Hall and Chairman Peterson.

Increased Funding for Specialty Crops

“By providing unprecedented support for specialty crops, the Farm Bill is going to help farms in the Hudson Valley stay in operation,” said Hall.

The Farm Bill establishes the Specialty Crop Research Initiative to develop and disseminate science-based tools to address the needs of specific crops, like those grown in the Hudson Valley, and different regions’ food safety, mechanization, genetics, plant breeding, pests and diseases. A total of \$466 million enhances the funding for the Specialty Crop Block Grant program that focuses on local efforts to enhance producers’ ability to compete in the marketplace. For the first time, fruit and vegetable producers will have their own place in the Farm Bill and will benefit from more than \$1.3 billion for new programs that support research, pest management, trade promotion and nutrition for the industry.

Promoting Energy Independence and Lowering Gas Prices

Today's Farm Bill takes a critical step to transition biofuels beyond corn. It reduces the current tax credit for corn-based ethanol by six cents per gallon and redirects the money to a new tax credit to promote the production of cellulosic biofuels. The legislation also invests \$1 billion in renewable energy focusing on new technologies and new sources, including \$320 million in loan guarantees for biorefineries that produce advanced biofuels and a new program to encourage the production of new biomass for cellulosic ethanol and other energy production, helping producers learn how to harvest, store, and transport biomass to bioenergy facilities.

"The emphasis on cellulosic biofuels is going to help wean America from foreign oil and transition homegrown biofuels beyond corn-based ethanol," said Hall.

Eliminating Farm Payments to the Wealthy

"The Farm Bill begins to end payments to the farmers who don't need the help, with the most significant reforms in over 30 years," said Hall. "This is good news for taxpayers and for the family farmers of New York and the Hudson Valley who have been underserved by previous federal farm legislation."

The income eligibility cap to receive subsidies for non-farm income is reduced by 80 percent, to \$500,000, and puts in place the first-ever cap for farm income at \$750,000 for fixed direct payment.

Help with Rising Food Costs

Almost three-fourths of the Farm Bill spending goes to nutrition programs to help 28 million American families afford healthy food. An additional \$10.4 billion in new spending goes to nutrition program. A dedicated \$1 billion will help public schools provide healthy snacks to students with free fresh fruits and vegetables.